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ABSTRACT

From the beginning, the Esperanto movement has flourished because of the work of young people. They were among the pioneers in promoting the language and its use. The World Esperanto Youth Organization was formed in 1920, and has experienced periods of growth and decline in interest and participation. A 1969 declaration calling on youth throughout the world to unite in the struggle for human dignity resulted in a number of new internal and external initiatives toward cooperation and information sharing. A 1980 manifesto on goals and methods of disseminating Esperanto in the 1980s, while less politically committed than the 1969 declaration, emphasizes steady forward movement and the development of a clearer focus for Esperanto work. (MSE)

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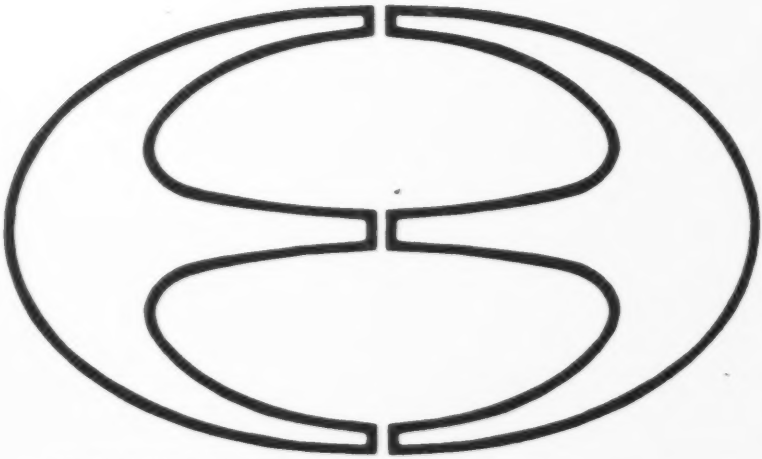

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# A HISTORY OF THE WORLD ESPERANTO YOUTH ORGANIZATION

**Norberto Saletti**

## PREFACE

It is still not generally recognized, at least in most countries of the world, that speakers of the International Language Esperanto form a worldwide community numbering in the hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions. Those outside the Esperanto movement often regard the language as a kind of social experiment, an attempt to see whether it might be possible to create an international language and actually have it work. Such people are inclined to believe that when Esperanto speakers get together, the main topic of conversation is verbs.

It may accordingly come as something of a surprise to discover that, in almost a hundred years of use, Esperanto has established itself on the world scene as a fully fledged, fully expressive means of communication. Far from using the language to discuss points of grammar, most Esperanto speakers, or "Esperantists," are concerned less with linguistics than with putting the language to practical use.

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Nowhere is this more evident than among young people. Esperanto has always been a language for youth. From the beginning many of its most enthusiastic adherents have been young people. They learn the language because it gives them a chance to travel, to meet people from many countries, to correspond with them, to talk politics and all the other things that fascinate young people, to get to know people on their own terms. Norberto Saletti, the General Secretary of TEJO, the World Esperanto Youth Organization, has written a brief history of that organization that shows clearly that Esperanto, in the hands and mouths of young people, is much more than a noble experiment: it is a powerful force for international understanding and a notable contribution to world peace that embodies the very spirit of International Youth Year.

Humphrey Tonkin

## ON THE THRESHOLD OF INTERNATIONAL YOUTH YEAR

To separate, in writing a history of the Esperanto movement, the youth movement from the general movement for Esperanto, makes very little sense: from the beginning, the Esperanto movement has flourished primarily because of the work of young people, who have developed the language and the idea behind it, bringing to completeness the original creation of Ludvik Lazar Zamenhof.

Today, almost a hundred years later, a quarter of the members of the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA) consists of people 25 years old or less – the customary upper age limit of "youth" in many contexts, including the United Nations.

In the early days of Esperantism, young people were among the pioneers in the promotion of Esperanto. We should not forget that, in 1878, a young man nineteen years of age began talking with friends about a project for a new, worldwide, neutral language, which might serve as a means of understanding for the peoples of the whole world, without distinction as to race, social position, politics and so on.

Others followed. Today's Universal Esperanto Association was established, in 1908, by the nineteen-year-old Hector Hodler; the Esperanto club in Prague was founded by an eighteen-year-old student, Edward Kühnl; as early as 1907, the then eighteen-year-old Edmond Privat went on a successful lecture tour through the United States.

In these early years, young people worked within the general Esperanto movement, not in a separate organizational structure for their own age group. The World Esperanto Youth Association (Tutmonda Esperantista Junulara Asocio – TEJA) was born only in 1920, publishing until 1929 the journal *Esperantist Youth (Esperantista Junularo)*. After 1929 there was a decline in interest, caused partly by the increasing age of the association's leaders and partly by no great interest on the part of other members of the Esperanto movement. In 1938, Mr. and Mrs. van Veenendaal, teachers from the Netherlands, organized the first International Youth Meeting (Internacia Junulara Kunveno) in Groet, in the Netherlands; earlier, in 1937, there was a joint British and French meeting of schoolchildren in Birmingham, in Britain. This date, 1938, is a key date in the Esperanto youth movement, since, during the IJK in Groet, the over 200 participants from

ten countries decided to found the World Youth Organization (Tutmonda Junular-Organizo – TJO).

The work of the newly created TJO was interrupted, after the second International Youth Meeting, in Tervuren, Belgium, by the Second World War and the confiscation of the organization's property in the Netherlands by the Nazi occupation forces in 1941. But, right after the war, in the autumn of 1945, the magazine for schoolchildren *Young Friend (La Juna Amiko)*, which had been initiated by the van Veenendaals in 1934, reappeared, and activities blossomed. In 1947 TJO became an affiliate of the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA), but relations between the two organizations were not entirely smooth. In 1948 TJO merged with the organization "Native Esperanto Speakers" (Denaska Esperantistaro). The IJK series began again in 1948 with the third IJK in Ipswich, Britain.

After the fifth IJK, in Versailles, France, the young membership of TJO/UEA became far more active, replacing their officeholders, who were for the most part older adults, with new forces. However, problems remained and the activities of this period can be summed up in the publication of *La Juna Vivo* and the organization of the IJK.

During the eighth IJK, in Ry, Denmark, in 1952, the organization changed its name to Tutmonda Esperantista Junular-Organizo (TEJO). This period was a time of crisis for TEJO: financial problems, internal quarrels, a lack of understanding by older Esperanto enthusiasts and other problems hindered the organization's activities. It was able to reactivate itself only in 1956, when, during the 12th IJK in Büsum (Federal Republic of Germany), it was decided to propose to UEA that TEJO become the Youth Section of UEA itself.

This proposal was accepted by the UEA Committee during that year's 41st World Congress of Esperanto in Copenhagen, Denmark. The Committee fixed separate and particularly favorable membership rates for its younger members, arranging that any UEA member less than 26 years of age was automatically a member of TEJO. Although some national Esperanto associations did not immediately accept TEJO's new status by forming or assisting youth sections in their countries, the youth movement grew relatively rapidly.

The period of internal reorganization came to an end in 1960, when, with the 16th International Youth Meeting in Rotterdam,

Netherlands, the organization opened itself up to the outside world by establishing relations with several non-Esperantist youth organizations (known as NEJOs). The following year, during the 17th IJK in Wokingham, Britain, several National Sections of TEJO signed the Wokingham Declaration, whose aim was to strengthen cooperation among the National Sections already in existence and to stimulate other groups to establish new sections.

In 1963, which TEJO and UEA jointly declared "The Year of Youth in the Esperanto Movement," the youth movement made significant progress: greater interest among the older membership, the acceptance of further National Sections, and, most important, the launching of *Kontakto (Contact)*, TEJO's cultural magazine, which, despite some technical ups and downs during its history, continues to appear today. *Kontakto* was, and is, particularly important, because it formed one of the most successful attempts to publish a periodical *in* Esperanto, and not necessarily *on* Esperanto.

As of 1964, external affairs received particular attention in TEJO, the quality of whose activities became more and more professional. Newsletters began to appear in ethnic languages (primarily English and French), and a permanent external relations section was established to maintain closer contacts with non-Esperantist youth organizations. During this time, and in line with these policies, the series of TEJO seminars began. Their purpose was, first, to persuade representatives of NEJOs to discuss language problems and, second, to exchange experiences and ideas.The first seminar of this kind took place in Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, in September 1965. In 1966 a separate series of seminars began, whose aim was to transfer experiences and information from one generation to another; these seminars were also opened to NEJO representatives, thereby establishing TEJO's maturity as an organization capable not only of dealing with its own main goal but also of assisting others in organizational methods.

The financial problems of TEJO came to a head in 1966, with the largest deficit in its history, coinciding, perhaps symbolically, with the most successful IJK, in Pécs, Hungary, which was attended by over nine hundred young people. During this period summer work camps, in which Esperanto was taught to participants, were particu-

larly popular. TEJO continues to organize such camps in cooperation with local organizations.

To assist young people to travel, and to support the sharing of experiences, there came into being in Argentina in 1966 the so-called Passport Program (Programo Pasporto), which was transformed a few years later into the Passport Service (see below). In this same highly productive period, TEJO became a corresponding member of the Coordinating Commission of the International Voluntary Service (CCIVS) at Unesco. Cooperation between TEJO and UEA grew stronger and the UEA Central Office took on some of TEJO's administrative functions. The deficit grew smaller, thanks in part to effective recruitment, but financial problems continued to hinder progress.

The social upheavals of the late 1960s did not pass TEJO by. Accordingly, during the 25th IJK in Tyresö, Sweden, the participants signed the Declaration that bears the name of that city. Through this Declaration, TEJO entered the social arena more consciously and actively, aware of the necessity not to ignore the social consequences of language problems and their connection with more general social issues. The text of the Declaration is as follows:

**Declaration**
**accepted by the participants in the 25th International Youth Congress of the World Esperantist Youth Organization in Tyresö, Sweden, August 3-10, 1969.**

In a number of lectures and discussion groups on the general subject "Youth and Society" we have studied the current radical change in the role of young people in society, which is evident in the intellectual and political mobilization of youth.

This mobilization is occurring primarily because of a feeling that the free development of the individual is endangered more and more by established systems of order.

These established systems of order are supported by two tendencies: first, outdated and over-standardized concepts of the individual, and, second, rapidly developing technology, which tends to destroy individuality and render it anonymous, destroy the physical surroundings of humanity and undermine the human psyche.

Language is a reality closely linked with social and political

phenomena. Thus, all activities associated with language problems are at the same time social activities.

If we consistently apply the concept of the preservation of the integrity of the individual, we are brought inevitably to disapproval of all forms of linguistic and cultural discrimination, to disapproval of all so-called solutions to the language problem that are based on discrimination, and to the realization that we have given insufficient attention to the destruction of the cultural and linguistic background of many peoples. Such destruction is nothing less than an instrument of linguistic imperialism.

In our own work we anticipate research and information on the inadequacy of the world language situation, and on its link with the destruction of the human personality in the name of technological and economic progress.

The mobilization of youth is a struggle for human dignity worthy of our support and participation.

The future programme of TEJO will include the launching of activities designed to expand the dimension of the individual in social and technological development. Such activities will be based on TEJO's special characteristics as an organization working for the elimination of all misuse of languages for economic, cultural or political suppression.

We call on all people and youth organizations to join in solidarity and, where possible, cooperation with TEJO in these activities.

This new approach to the outside world, and the role of Esperanto and the Esperanto movement in it, brought about a number of new internal and external initiatives: more activity with NEJOs; changes in the programmatic formula of the IJKs, which became forums for the discussion of given issues and topics current among young people; seminars on various subjects, open to representatives of NEJOs; Summer University Courses, as of 1972 (outside TEJO's auspices but closely linked with TEJO); organization and improvement of existing meetings, such as the International Seminar of the German Esperanto Youth, the weekend gatherings in Japan and Korea, the Cultural Festival in Bulgaria, and so on.

New opportunities for recruitment and activities came in the late 1970s with the membership of TEJO in the Geneva Informal Meeting (GIM), which the Organization joined in May, 1979. This western

European body seeks to bring nongovernmental youth organizations together and give them an opportunity to have contact with one another. For TEJO it became a forum for cooperation and the arousal of interest among other organizations. In fact, today, in the work of TEJO, a particularly outstanding role is played by the External Relations Commission (KER), the so-called "bridge to the crocodiles" (a "crocodile," in Esperanto jargon is someone who does not speak the International Language), which has represented and continues to represent Esperanto youth in dozens of international meetings each year. In this way cooperation with other youth associations has also grown firmer, for example with the World Federation of Democratic Youth and the International Union of Students.

An important aspect of KER's work, as we have already mentioned, is the organization of seminars on various social topics, and the publication of reports on the results, translated into several languages. A major success in this area has been the organization of seminars, beginning in 1979, in cooperation with the European Youth Centre, in Strasbourg (France), which is directly affiliated with the Council of Europe. KER also coordinates TEJO's representation at the United Nations in Vienna and New York.

Following the pattern of evolution of the youth movement and its context, in 1980, during the 36th IJK in Rauma, Finland, a special discussion group examined the topic "Esperanto in the Eighties: Goals and Methods," and concluded by writing a *Manifesto*, which bears the name of the congress city. While this *Rauma Manifesto* was signed only by some of the participants, and while it was less politically committed than the Tyresö Declaration, it does none the less give some basic notion of the point of view of the current generation of young people. Its text is as follows:

1. **Crisis of Identity**

The signers of this document have noted a contradiction in the attitude of Esperantists – a kind of conflict between ego and super-ego: our super-ego causes us to preach to others about certain myths – a second language for all, English is our enemy, the UN should adopt Esperanto, and so on – and to praise the Esperanto language to the skies, even without objectivity, in public interviews. At the same time, among ourselves, we enjoy and apply Es-

peranto for what it really is, independently of such slogans associated with past goals. This is indeed an identity crisis, and we feel the necessity to motivate our identity as Esperantists with something more coherent.

2. **Criticism of Past Goals**

We believe that: a) official recognition of Esperanto is neither likely nor essential in the 1980s: we should have alternative goals; b) overcoming English is neither a task nor a concern of Esperantists; when all is said and done, English functions only as an *auxiliary* language, much as French once did (perhaps even in a less important way than was the case with French); Zamenhof never proposed as a goal of the Esperanto movement that it oppose French, because he anticipated a more valuable alternative role for Esperanto.

3. **Our Goals**

We aim to disseminate Esperanto in order, more and more, and stage by stage, to realize the following positive values:

a) Esperanto as an introduction, a propedeutic, for language study;
b) Esperanto as a means of contact among ordinary people;
c) Non-discriminating contacts;
d) A new kind of international culture.

In connection with major issues of value, we emphasize that the search for our own identity has caused us to see our situation as Esperantists as membership in a self-selected linguistic diaspora. Growth in our resources and the addition of new recruits is directly dependent on awareness of these values.

4. **Congresses as a Path to Growth**

International congresses and meetings are essential for assimilating people into our language community: on the one hand it is essential that our congresses take place more often and that meetings of administrative committees be reserved for separate administrative meetings, along the lines of the TEJO Seminar in Strasbourg (June 1980 – "International Communication: the Application of Esperanto"), and on the other hand it is essential that

we increase the use of Esperanto as a working language in international professional conferences, along the lines of the Freinet teachers.

5. **We Possess Force and Content**

We believe that Esperanto's first century has proved the suitability of the language to express *everything*; in the mid-1980s, at the beginning of the second century, we must begin to show to the world that we are also capable of saying *something* – something culturally original and internationally valuable.

The lively debate that ensued created new interest among older Esperantists in the youth movement, as was evident, for example, in the 67th World Congress of Esperanto, in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1982. On that occasion, during the debate on the congress topic, "Generational Aspects of the Esperanto Movement," several young people asserted that it makes no sense to consider TEJO and its members as "the future of the Esperanto movement:" young people feel themselves to be "the present" of the movement, because of their effective recruitment and information work.

Such considerations harmonize well with TEJO's publishing activity: *Kontakto*, its cultural journal, as of 1983, has begun to appear more often, and contains sections for beginning learners of Esperanto, to facilitate their entry into the community of fluent speakers; likewise as of 1983, *TEJO Tutmonde (TEJO Worldwide)* has been launched, to serve as a link among National Sections, particularly outside Europe (for the European National Sections, there already exists *Koncize (Conciselv)*, also a bi-monthly publication).

Particularly worthy of mention is the ethnic-language newsletter *NNN*, i.e. *News-Novajoj-Nouvelles*, which gives information on KER activities, and wich goes primarily to NEJOs.

The Passport Service continues to expand. This "travel" service that TEJO runs for its members, and all Esperanto speakers, consists of a list of people and organizations willing to host, in return for a modest payment or without charge, Esperantists as they move from one meeting to another.

The entire activity of TEJO was given a major boost by the decision of the United Nations to declare the year 1985 International

Youth Year. This brought several new or updated initiatives, such as participation in major world events concerned with the Year, the publication of handbooks aimed at transferring organizational knowledge from one group to another, international representations, and so on.

These brief lines show that TEJO has learned from its history how to confront major difficulties and overcome them, and that it can present to the outside public an attractive and favorable image of itself and of Esperanto, thereby winning for itself and the entire effort for Esperanto more and more attention, renown and favour.

*NORBERTO SALETTI was born in Bologna, Italy, in 1957; he became an Esperantist in 1971, and an active member of the Movement in 1978. As general secretary of TEJO between 1983 and 1985, he helped to develop the TEJO programme for the International Youth Year. He is a student of medicine in Bologna.*

**Publication list of Esperanto Documents**

**No. Title**

1. Unesco and the UEA (out of print)
2. Universal Esperanto Association, Annual Report 1974-75 (out of print)
3. The 60th Universal Congress of Esperanto
4. The development of poetic language in Esperanto
5. The contribution of the Universal Esperanto Association to world peace (out of print)
6. An introduction to Esperanto studies (out of print)
7. Esperanto on the air
8. The Universal Esperanto Association in International Women's Year 1975
9. International travel by speakers of Esperanto
10. Universal Esperanto Association, Annual Report 1975-76
11. Language problems and the Final Act (out of print)
12. Esperanto and the Universal Esperanto Association (out of print)
13. Language and the right to communicate (out of print)
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16. The use of the international language Esperanto as a partial solution to language problems in international nongovernmental organizations: some recommendations
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34. The language problem in tourism
35. A history of the World Esperanto Youth Organization
36. A lingua franca for Africa
37. The contribution of the Universal Esperanto Association to world peace
38. The language problem in science and the role of the international language Esperanto

*Several of the above documents are also available in French or Esperanto.*